



Hispanic Recreation at Corps of Engineers Lakes in the Greater Tulsa Area: Results of Two Hispanic Focus Groups

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE: The U.S. Army Engineer District, Tulsa, administers 38 water resource development projects in Oklahoma and two neighboring states. More than 250 recreation areas on these projects provide a wide range of opportunities for boating, camping, fishing, picnicking, and other outdoor activities. Most of the projects and associated recreation facilities in the Tulsa District are more than 30 years old. Many of the recreation facilities have deteriorated with age and have become increasingly more expensive and difficult to maintain. Frequent flooding of some projects affects popular recreation areas. Facilities at many recreation areas are becoming functionally obsolete, as visitor needs change over time.

In recognition of aging recreation facilities, changing visitor needs, and other factors, the Tulsa District has undertaken a study of its recreation program with the goal of identifying recreation modernization opportunities that will best meet the needs of both current and future recreation visitors. Results of this ongoing study and other related research strongly indicate that people of Hispanic ethnicity are in the process of rapidly becoming an important new recreation visitor on many Corps projects. Throughout much of the country, people of Hispanic ethnicity have not traditionally used Corps projects for recreation purposes. But a recent survey of recreation managers of Corps lakes suggests that a majority of Corps projects both nationally and in the Tulsa, Oklahoma area began receiving Hispanic visitors during the 1990's.

U.S. Census data indicate that the 1990's were a period of unprecedented expansion and growth of the Hispanic population in the United States. In Tulsa, Hispanic population growth during the 1990's was partly associated with increased job opportunities, especially in industry and service sectors of the economy. Recreation managers from several projects in the Tulsa area first noted Hispanic visitors to their projects shortly after new industrial or business facilities began operating in nearby communities. It was apparent that many of the new Hispanic visitors were employees of these new industries or businesses. Some of the newly created jobs, including those in meat processing plants and large wholesale nurseries were entry-level positions that were filled by recent immigrants to the United States. As a result, some of the new visitors to Corps projects were not familiar with the English language or with many aspects of local American culture.

Demographic projections indicate that overall population growth in Oklahoma will be quite modest in the next 25 years. However, the Hispanic population is expected to nearly triple during this period (Campbell 1996). As a consequence, it is likely that Hispanic visitors to Corps projects will continue to increase, both in numbers and possibly as a percentage of total project visits. In recognition of demographic trends and their expected effect on visitor use of Corps projects, the Tulsa District would like to better understand the recreation needs of Hispanic visitors and of the communities in which they live.

This report documents the results of two focus group sessions with the Hispanic community in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The purpose of these focus group sessions was twofold: first, to provide Tulsa District with firsthand input from Hispanic community stakeholders and recreation end users on their perceptions and opinions of Corps recreation facilities and services. The second was to identify potential partners for future Hispanic community outreach efforts by the Tulsa District. The results of the Hispanic outreach effort documented in this report should give Corps of Engineers decision makers much greater insight into improving outdoor recreation opportunities for Hispanic Americans.

METHODS

Organization of Focus Groups. Background research began in early June 2001 to identify potential outreach partners, focus group participants, and suitable locations for the meetings. Two focus groups were planned from the outset. The first meeting would be with Hispanic community leaders or “stakeholders,” while the second would be with Hispanic recreation visitors or “end users.”

Three Hispanic organizations in the Tulsa area were identified that could assist in the organization of the “stakeholders” meeting. These included the Greater Tulsa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (GTHCC), the Coalition of Hispanic Organizations, and the Greater Tulsa Area Hispanic Affairs Commission. Initial contact with Mr. Robert Tobias, President of the GTHCC, revealed that key members of the other two organizations also served on the Advisory Board of the GTHCC and that it would be most efficient to work primarily with the GTHCC. Mr. Tobias identified and invited the GTHCC members, including key individuals from the Coalition and the Hispanic Affairs Commission. The stakeholder’s focus group was planned for August 24, 2001 at the Doubletree Hotel- Warren Place.

To assist ERDC in the organization of the end users’ focus group, a number of Tulsa District lake managers were contacted. Two lakes with high Hispanic visitation emerged as possible sites for the end users’ focus group, Keystone Lake and Skiatook Lake. Both lakes received high day-user visitation on weekends by Hispanics from the Tulsa metro area. Following further coordination with Mr. Kent Dunlap, the Keystone Lake manager, it became apparent that this project provided us with all of the ingredients for a successful meeting. The relatively close location of the lake made it a favorite place for Hispanic visitation, and meeting the needs of these visitors was a paramount concern of Mr. Dunlap. His enthusiastic support of this research from the outset was critical. Over the course of the summer, Mr. Dunlap and his senior ranger, Mr. Mike Schrick, made an all-out effort to ensure the success of the Keystone Lake focus group. Their efforts included personal contacts with Hispanic visitors, the posting of flyers around the lake, and contacting Tulsa area civic and church groups. Mr. Schrick personally spoke to the congregation of St. Francis Xavier church, the largest and most dynamic Hispanic congregation in Tulsa.

The original plan was to hold this focus group at Keystone Lake in conjunction with a Saturday afternoon outdoor picnic. Extreme heat and drought conditions at the lake made this less desirable as the summer wore on. Consequently, the end users’ focus group was brought indoors to the Padre Miguel Pro Center at St. Francis Xavier Church in Tulsa. Ms. Teresa Sotelo,

Director of Education at the church, was added to the planning team and proved to be instrumental in organizing this focus group and serving as the group's translator.

Conduct of Focus Groups. With minor modifications, both focus group sessions employed a methodology that was developed collaboratively with Texas A&M University and has been employed in six previous focus group sessions earlier in the year to obtain input from several different racial and ethnic groups who were potential users of Corps projects elsewhere in the United States. The meetings in Tulsa were scheduled to last 2.5 hr and consisted of four parts as follows. The meetings began with a 10-minute presentation by Mr. Richard Kasul, an ERDC team member who described the purpose of the meeting and provided participants with an understanding of the importance of their information to the future of Hispanic recreation at Corps lakes in the Tulsa area. Mr. Kasul's PowerPoint introductory presentation appears in Appendix A.

The meeting was then turned over to a professional facilitator who took the meeting participants through a 1- to 1.5-hr discussion oriented around the following questions:

- What are the unmet or under-met needs for outdoor recreation in the Greater Tulsa Area?
- What are the major barriers to meeting those needs on Corps lakes?
- How can the Corps of Engineers overcome barriers and improve outdoor recreation opportunities for the Greater Tulsa Hispanic community?

After discussion of all issues of importance to the Hispanic community, meeting participants were asked to react to a short list of visitor issues of potential importance for recreation management. This was done to ensure discussion of particular issues of potential importance to the Tulsa District that may not have arisen in earlier discussions. At the conclusion of all information gathering, meeting participants were joined by observers from the Corps of Engineers and interested state recreation management agencies to listen to a summary of the information provided by participants during the meeting.

Each meeting followed this basic approach with the following exceptions. The stakeholders meeting ran approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes beyond the scheduled ending time. All of the additional time was taken up by the summary session, which was interspersed with extensive unstructured discussion of issues among the focus group participants and Tulsa District staff. There were two departures from the meeting agenda at the end users meeting. Because this was a less formal group and because a number of the participants were not comfortable communicating in English, the facilitator utilized a visioning exercise to obtain additional information from the focus group participants. Starting with a blank sheet of paper titled "Ideal Lake," he asked each participant to contribute at least one item to a drawing of what an ideal park on a Corps lake would look like to Hispanic visitors. Different participants contributed drawings or descriptions of facility and setting features that their ideal park would contain. One individual prepared her own drawing, included as Figure 1. The large picnic shelter and volleyball court are two of the land-based recreational facilities that strongly appeal to the Hispanic families that utilize Corps facilities on weekends.



Figure 1. Sketch of an ideal Corps park by end user focus group participant

RESULTS OF STAKEHOLDERS FOCUS GROUP

Mr. Robert Dunn of ERDC welcomed the focus group participants (Appendix B). Mr. Richard Kasul presented an overview of national and regional demographic trends emphasizing the dramatically increasing Hispanic population nationwide and within the Tulsa District (Appendix A). Mr. Kasul introduced Dr. Dale Brown, who presented the three general

discussion questions shown above. Dr. Brown asked each participant to introduce himself/herself to the group and describe an activity that they enjoy when visiting a Corps lake in Oklahoma.



Figure 2. Stakeholders focus group (Doubletree Hotel-Warren Place 8/24/01)

After describing their favorite activity, each participant was allowed to expand his or her comments into other areas of concern. A wide-ranging and lively discussion rapidly developed among the entire group that focused on six general themes. These themes include communication, education, Hispanic recreational style, Corps facilities, job opportunities for Hispanics, and guidelines for better relations with the Hispanic community. The overall tone of the focus group was enthusiastic and supported the Corps' objective to improve recreational opportunities for Hispanics. There were many incisive observations by this group of intelligent and highly acculturated Hispanic Americans.

Communication

- There is a desire for Spanish language signs at Corps lakes in the Tulsa area; basic safety rules should be accessible to Hispanics who do not read English.
- More detailed rules and regulations should be provided in Spanish as well as English; Hispanics would follow the Corps rules if they knew what they were; most cases of rule violation result from a lack of knowledge of park rules.



Figure 3. Debriefing attendees (Doubletree Hotel-Warren Place 8/24/01)

- Rules and regulations in Spanish should be written in short **positive** statements that avoid negatives as much as possible; do not say “don’t do this” but rather say “ Do this! “ and provide a brief explanation of why.
- International symbols may be useful because many first-generation immigrant Hispanic families have members who are illiterate and do not read Spanish or English.
- Emergency situations can always arise, so there is a need for more Spanish-speaking rangers and gate attendants at Corps parks.
- The Corps should consider providing “ethnic diversity” or “cultural sensitivity” training to rangers who routinely work with ethnic minority groups.
- Good language skills combined with cultural sensitivity training are critical for Corps rangers to defuse tense situations or to help in emergencies; one participant asked whether the Army language school in Monterey, California might be able to provide short but intensive courses in Spanish for Corps of Engineers rangers.

Education

- First and foremost, Hispanics want to be treated with respect; language and cultural training of rangers would be noticed and welcomed by Hispanic visitors.
- The Corps should attempt to educate visiting Hispanic families about the environment, the public use areas, and safety in the water.

- Maps, directions, and brochures should be available in Spanish; these should be available at the lake but also at places where families shop for food and beverages (e.g., Qwik Trips convenience stores) when they go to visit a Corps lake.
- One participant opined that Asians assimilate faster than Hispanics because they mainly come as refugees and their economic survival depends on how quickly they learn English and act like white Americans; in this person's opinion Hispanics do not feel such intense pressure to assimilate and to learn English as quickly as possible because the Hispanic community is large and very supportive of new immigrants.
- The best way for the Corps to reach Hispanics about water safety and other issues is through radio public service announcements on Spanish-speaking radio stations; Corps should not rely totally on print media even when it is a Spanish language newspaper.

Hispanic Recreational Style

- Hispanic American recreation is very strongly group-oriented and most often includes extended family members; the Spanish term for family (familia) covers a much wider network of relatives than among most white families.
- Hispanic recreation is day-use and land- or shore-based; few working class Hispanic visitors own boats or personal water craft; some middle-class Hispanics own boats, but the large number of first-generation immigrant families in Oklahoma do not.
- Outdoor cooking and picnicking for a large extended family is a favorite activity at Corps lakes; when several families and friends join together, group sizes in excess of 100 people are quite common.
- A family of six is considered small by most Hispanics; when both a husband's and wife's extended families recreate together (not unusual), group sizes may exceed 25 or more; when several extended families recreate together, group sizes exceeding 100 are not uncommon.
- Favorite forms of land-based recreation are soccer, volleyball, and baseball; these activities require open, relatively flat grassy areas which are not always found in Corps public use areas.
- Few Hispanic family members are confident swimmers, although many enjoy wading, splashing, and cooling off in the water on hot summer days; when older children watch younger children at Corps designated swimming areas, there is a potential danger of drowning.

Corps Facilities

- Group picnic shelters are important for Hispanic recreation at Corps lakes; individual picnic sites are inadequate for large extended families.
- Larger and cleaner grills are needed to cook food for large family groups or to reheat food that has been prepared at home and brought to the lake.
- Restroom facilities are not well-maintained and are very unappealing.
- There are Hispanic concerns over water quality at some Corps lakes (e.g., Keystone); amoeba problem; rumors about women getting yeast infections after using swimming areas at Keystone; too many dead fish at Fort Gibson Lake.

- Hispanics would like boat rentals (fishing and paddle boats) at Corps lakes.
- Corps lakes need places to buy picnic items (food and beverages) and other supplies; this arrangement is common in Mexico and many immigrant families are surprised this is not the case in the United States.
- Desire to have refreshment kiosks near swimming areas for beverages e.g., lemonade.
- Desire for large, flat, grassy areas to play soccer, volleyball, etc.; no permanent structures are necessary, just enough room to accommodate groups of men and boys (sometimes girls, too) who wish to play team sports when they come to the lake.

Job Opportunities for Hispanics

- Hispanics would like to compete for Corps jobs in recreation; but they are not aware of available job opportunities or the requirements for the jobs.
- One way to get more rangers who speak Spanish is to hire Hispanics, especially young bilingual men and women who have been raised in the Hispanic language and culture.
- Plant “seeds of interest” early by visiting local high schools and describing employment opportunities for Hispanic youth with the Corps of Engineers.
- The Corps could look for opportunities to hire outstanding Hispanic youth as student aides or “summer hires”; this will develop an interest in pursuing a career in the Corps of Engineers.
- A video describing the Corps of Engineers and the employment requirements and opportunities for minorities would be useful; the video could be shown in high schools and colleges and other education-related locations.

Guidelines for Better Relations with the Hispanic Community

- Increase visibility of rangers at parks; many Hispanic women are afraid to come to the lake by themselves or with girlfriends.
- There are relatively few problems with other visitors (Anglo or Hispanic), but where they exist the problems are usually related to excessive alcohol consumption; an increased security presence is needed for these situations.
- Change the Corps public image (now perceived as white only) by using Hispanic spokespersons in public service announcements (e.g., “Ranger Jose”) on TV and radio.
- Reach out to unacculturated Hispanic visitors (those “outside the bubble”) by helping them overcome their fear of uniformed Corps personnel; rangers should be friendly and communicative (learn to speak some Spanish!); the green uniform of Corps rangers is too similar to those worn by immigration officers, so an extra effort is needed to overcome their fear.
- More Hispanic rangers would increase visitors’ sense of well-being, but to accomplish this will require a proactive effort on the part of the Corps; suggestions included rangers visiting high schools with high Hispanic enrollment to discuss what the Corps does and what employment opportunities may exist in the future; educational requirements should be made clear (e.g., college degree related to natural resources management).

Dr. Brown next turned the attention of the group to identifying and overcoming major barriers that now exist to meeting the recreational needs of Hispanic visitors at Corps of Engineer lakes. Four barriers were identified by the focus group discussants: Hispanics' perception of Anglo lack of understanding of Hispanic culture, the language barrier, lack of adequate funding and inadequate facilities, and transportation problems. The following section describes these barriers and the groups' recommendations on how they might be overcome.

Hispanics' Perception of Anglo Lack of Understanding of Hispanic Culture

- Some Anglos appear to resent the rapid growth of Hispanic populations in their communities and actively discriminate against Hispanics; one participant cited the ongoing situation in Oklahoma where Hispanics are being asked to pay for the translation of driver's education manuals and the written part of the driving test into Spanish; many Hispanics see this as inherently unfair.
- Because they cannot take the written driving test in English, many Hispanics cannot get their driver's license and so cannot drive to work or take a job where a driver's license is required.
- Racist behavior does not appear to be a major problem with the Corps of Engineers employees; rather it is more a question of the agency's lack of cultural understanding, and its apparent lack of understanding of how to deal with people from a different cultural background and speaking a different language.
- One participant suggested that the Corps adopt a service industry model for cultural awareness training (e.g., such training is offered by American Airlines).
- If existing cultural diversity awareness courses are not available, then the Corps should develop its own training courses and hire expert contractors to teach these courses.

The Language Barrier

- Existing language barriers between rangers and Hispanic visitors pose a potential safety hazard during emergency situations when rangers and Hispanic visitors cannot communicate with each other.
- The Corps should support bilingual education programs at its projects, e.g., interpretive talks and displays.
- The Corps should encourage Spanish language training for rangers at projects with high Hispanic visitation.
- Perhaps the most efficient short-term solution to the language problem is to hire and train Hispanic rangers.

Lack of Adequate Funding and Inadequate Facilities

- Focus group participants recognize that funding levels limit ability to maintain facilities; better-maintained facilities would attract more visitors.
- The Corps should seek additional Federal funding for facility and service improvements that would benefit all visitors, including Hispanics.

- The Corps may be able to cost-share some facility improvements at its lakes with local Hispanic communities; Hispanics recognize that funding for capital improvements is extremely limited and they would like to help the Corps overcome that limitation on parks that they use.
- The Corps should look for opportunities to work with local groups. (e.g., Greater Tulsa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce) to find cost-sharing partners.
- Hispanic organizations are willing to work with the Corps on cost-sharing and other arrangements that benefit the Hispanic community.
- Hispanics note the potential benefit of promoting a Hispanic concept of “ownership” for the upkeep/remediation of Corps facilities; this sense of ownership contributes to a sense of belonging.

Transportation Problems

- The basic problem is that there is no public transportation to Corps lakes located in rural areas (e.g., Keystone Lake, Skiatook Lake, etc.).
- The group recommended that the Corps (perhaps using the City of Tulsa’s buses) provide shuttle service for weekend day users.
- Many Hispanics don’t know about Corps lakes or their recreation facilities.
- The group’s perception was that there was inadequate directional information to Corps projects (even in English, much less in Spanish).

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

As noted previously, a questionnaire (Appendix C) was administered at the end of the focus group when two of the participants had to leave for other appointments. Table 1 shows the results of this effort and a more detailed discussion of each question follows.

Table 1 Results of Questionnaire				
Statement	Strongly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
Hispanics would have difficulty paying a fee of \$3-5 per vehicle every time they came to a Corps park	1	1	1	1
Hispanic visitors who do not understand English encounter more problems during their park visits than do those who understand English	1	3		
Park signs using international symbols would be an effective substitute for Spanish language signs	1		3	
The ability to make telephone or Internet reservations only in English prevents some Hispanic groups from reserving campsites or group shelter through the National Recreation Reservation System			4	
Hispanic visitors are sometimes made to feel unwelcome by other visitors		3	1	
Park staff sometimes make Hispanic visitors to Corps lakes feel unwelcome	2	1		1

Question 1: Hispanic visitors would have difficulty paying a fee of \$3-5 per vehicle every time they came to a Corps park.

The group was split on this question: one strongly disagreed; one strongly agreed; one was not sure and one neither agreed nor disagreed. In discussion the group revealed that while Oklahoma Hispanics are relatively poor, such a fee would not be seen as a burden provided the project is well-maintained, well-patrolled, and people feel safe. In general, fees are okay if the money is used for visible park improvements.

Question 2: Hispanic visitors who do not understand English encounter more problems during their park visits than do those who understand English.

One discussant strongly disagreed; three neither agreed nor disagreed. Discussion revealed that the problem here is that many Hispanic visitors simply don't know the rules or the proper etiquette for recreating at the Corps lakes; if the rules were presented in a positive fashion (do this because....) and in Spanish, many of the current problems would disappear.

Question 3: Park signs using international symbols would be an effective substitute for Spanish language signs.

One participant strongly disagreed, while three others strongly agreed. Discussion of this point revealed that symbols were useful in some contexts but did not take the place of personal communication; the question of recent immigrants who could not read even Spanish was raised in favor of symbols; one discussant mentioned the utility of symbols in reference to maps; others noted that while they were useful, some symbols were hard to interpret or understand.

Question 4: The ability to make telephone or Internet reservations only in English prevents some Hispanic groups from reserving campsites or group shelters through the National Recreation Reservation Service.

All four focus group participants strongly agreed. This seemed to be a matter of common sense to the group. They also noted that many Hispanics lack knowledge about the need to reserve large group picnic shelters and how to make reservations for them.

Question 5: Hispanic visitors are sometimes made to feel unwelcome by other visitors.

Responses to this question were weakly positive. Three responses were in the 4-5 range (neither agree nor disagree), while one response was a 6 (agree). Discussion of the question revealed that the major cause of friction with other visitors was alcohol. Remove the alcohol and most interpersonal problems should go away. There was little mention or concern with inter-ethnic group conflicts.

Question 6: Park staff members sometimes make Hispanic visitors to Corps lakes feel unwelcome.

Two participants strongly disagreed; one neither agreed nor disagreed and one was not sure. In general, the Corps rangers were viewed positively and several members of the group described positive experiences they or members of their families have had with Corps rangers. The Corps rangers were perceived as "good guys" who just didn't have the tools to cross the cultural

distance between whites and unacculturated Hispanics. The language barrier is perceived as a major part of the problem. However, increased cultural awareness, obtained through diversity awareness and sensitivity training courses, would be beneficial, even in the absence of Spanish language skills.

END USERS' FOCUS GROUP RESULTS (Padre Miguel Pro Center at St. Francis Xavier Church): The second focus group was held on Saturday, August 25, 2001 at the Padre Miguel Pro Center at St. Francis Xavier Church, 2510 East Admiral Boulevard in Tulsa. This "end users" focus group was originally planned to be held at Keystone Lake but was changed to an indoor setting due to the extreme temperatures. Mr. Kent Dunlap, Keystone Lake Manager, and his senior ranger, Mr. Mike Schrick, organized the focus group. Ms. Teresa Sotelo, Director of Education at St. Francis Church, was instrumental in inviting the participants for the discussion, and serving as our translator. The focus group was comprised of four adult women and eight teenagers (six girls and two boys). The teenaged participants were all members of St. Francis Church's Legion of Mary (see Figures 4-6).



Figure 4. Focus group participants at Fr. Miguel Pro Center



Figure 5. Focus group participants at Fr. Miguel Pro Center



Figure 6. Teresa Sotelo (left) and focus group participants at Miguel Pro Center

The tone of this focus group was somewhat reserved initially because of the number of teenagers who were reluctant (or unable) to speak in English. At the urging of Ms. Sotelo, they finally spoke in Spanish and became much more animated. Toward the end of the session a visioning exercise (drawing of an ideal park) brought forth a burst of creative energy (see Figures 7-8). The focus group also completed the comparative questionnaire with the assistance of Ms. Sotelo who translated each of the questions for the group members. This focus group was valuable for the insight it provided into the perceptions of relatively non-aculturated Hispanic visitors.



Figure 7. Visioning exercise of an ideal Corps park

The meeting began with introductory remarks by Mr. Robert Dunn of ERDC. He indicated that the Corps' Tulsa District is keenly interested in reaching out to the Hispanic community and that focus groups constituted an important way for the Corps to better understand the needs of its customers. Hispanic Americans are becoming a significant part of the Corps customer base in Oklahoma and other parts of the country and it is important for Corps Districts to understand what their Hispanic visitors think of their facilities and services and how both can be improved. Dr. Brown then gave a quick overview of the meeting topics and introduced the three questions dealing with unmet needs, major barriers, and how the Corps might overcome those barriers.



Figure 8. Dr. Dale Brown and the results of the group visioning exercise

The focus group discussion began when the facilitator asked each person to introduce himself or herself and describe how they liked to recreate at Corps lakes. Day use activities such as picnicking, swimming, and group sports such as soccer and volleyball were all mentioned. Water sports and camping were not mentioned. As noted earlier, three of the four adult women responded directly in English. All other group members spoke in Spanish to Ms. Sotelo who in turn translated their responses into English.

The focus group identified eight distinct issues. Because of their familiarity with Keystone Lake, the group members chose to focus their remarks solely on this lake. The group's concerns are briefly described below:

- **Need for More Group Picnic Shelters Near Swim Beaches.** Hispanic families tend to be large and require more space than is currently available at Keystone and presumably other Corps lakes in the Tulsa area; most families now try to push picnic tables together so that family members can eat together; the group recommended larger tables and more larger group shelters to accommodate the large group size of Hispanic families.

- **Hazardous Swimming Area.** Rocks in or near the swimming area at Washington Irving South public use area were mentioned by several focus group participants; based on our visit to this site on August 23, the focus group participants were referring to the riprap-armored shoreline on the Arkansas River in this park; the large pieces of riprap close to the swimming area do constitute a safety hazard for young children who play along the shoreline.
- **Flooding in Parking Lot.** Several discussants noted that the parking lot at Irving Cove South public use area floods periodically and prevents parking; also flooding leaves behind mud and debris, which is both smelly and unsightly; due to the extreme fluctuation of the lake during flood events some consideration might be given to relocating the parking lot near the swim beach area in this park and moving the picnic tables out of the area which is routinely inundated. Parking lots should be close to picnic areas because Hispanic families bring a lot of food to the lake; they should not be located in areas that flood frequently.
- **Need for Open Grassy Areas for Sports.** There is a strong need for open grassy areas where Hispanic families can play ball together; these areas should be open and relatively flat so that a variety of sports activities could be pursued; soccer, volleyball, and baseball were all mentioned by the group; the teenaged boys indicated that they and their friends would also enjoy basketball courts and other more permanent facilities.
- **Cleaner and Better Restrooms.** The group applauded when one girl had the temerity to mention that she wanted cleaner and better-smelling restrooms; discussion of this topic indicated an overall lack of cleanliness was particularly offensive to the women and girls when they came with their families to the lake.
- **Shower Heads Near Swim Beaches.** The women of the group suggested that shower heads should be installed near the swimming areas so that people could rinse off after swimming in the lake, which is not always clean water; when pressed on this they indicated that a concrete slab with an open shower head setup would be perfectly acceptable.
- **More Trash Containers.** The same large families that need more tables and larger picnic shelters produce a lot of trash when they come to the lake; one woman noted that she often brings her own large trash can liners and leaves them next to the overflowing trash cans at the lake; more trash cans or larger trash receptacles (perhaps dumpsters) might help this problem.
- **Debris in Picnic Areas.** The group indicated that many times there are trees, tree limbs, mud, and trash at their favorite swimming area at Keystone (Irving Cove South); they wondered if anything could be done about this problem; this debris problem is related to the extreme water level fluctuations in this park, which adjoins a major flood storage reservoir; perhaps the short-term solution is more frequent cleanup and maintenance during the times of the year when these flood events occur.

In the next section of the discussion, Dr. Brown turned the attention of the group to the barriers, which now prevent the Corps meeting the needs of its Hispanic visitors. The discussion of this topic was very insightful and generally fell into three areas: differences in cultural activities (Hispanics vs. Anglos) and the Corps' apparent lack of knowledge about how Hispanic people like to recreate, the need for the Corps to develop better public outreach, and recommendations

to the Corps on how to make better use of the media to make the Hispanic community aware of Corps recreational opportunities (more information in Spanish).

Cultural Differences Between Hispanics and Anglos

- Hispanics and Anglos recreate differently in this group's opinion; these differences were revealed most strongly when the group members tried to depict an ideal park for Hispanic recreation, not a single boat or boat ramp was depicted (see Figure 7); recreation among unacculturated Hispanics is strongly group- and family-oriented and land-based or shore-based (swimming and wading); the water-based recreation that fascinates Anglo men and their relatively small families (camping, fishing, riding personal water craft, water skiing, etc.) held little interest to these working-class Hispanic women.
- The Corps does not know about these cultural differences because many Hispanics do not want to voice their opinions; they do not wish to cause trouble for their families, so they remain quiet and put up with existing conditions because they do not believe anything will change if they speak up.

Need for Better Advertisement of Corps Projects

- The Corps needs to do a better job at advertising its recreational opportunities; many Hispanics only find out about Corps lakes through word of mouth from friends and family; flyers, brochures, etc. should be available in convenience stores and other places where Hispanics shop for picnic items; radio spots on Spanish radio stations would reach the majority of Hispanic people in the Tulsa area.
- Make changes at the lakes that benefit Hispanics and many more people will come; use the media to make the people aware of these changes as they occur.
- Use Spanish language newspapers and Spanish-speaking radio stations to reach the Hispanic community; don't put announcements only in the English language newspaper *Tulsa World*.
- The Corps needs to provide better directional information (in English and Spanish!) so that Hispanic visitors can find Corps projects.

Hispanic Visitors Need More Information in Spanish

- The Corps needs to provide basic information (rules and regulations) to Hispanic visitors in Spanish.
- Signing in Spanish is important because it is part of an education process; if people know what is expected, they will generally comply with the rules. The problem with many Hispanic visitors is that they just don't know the rules and do not speak or read English well enough to learn on their own.

The Ideal Corps Park: A Visioning Exercise

At the end of the discussion, the focus group participants were asked to depict an ideal Corps park from the Hispanic perspective. Figures 7 and 8 show the participants preparing this

drawing. Dr. Brown wrote the word “fishing” as an illustrative example and then immediately crossed it off. No participants depicted any fishing activity during the exercise. The drawing shows large picnic shelters, many picnic tables, large benches, large grills close to the picnic shelters, volleyball nets and basketball courts, a large parking area, and pay phones for emergencies. The drawing provides strong corroboration of the focus group discussion points with its emphasis on day-use and land-based activities and facilities.

Responses to Questionnaire

Due to a few early departures, only nine of the twelve participants completed the questionnaire. Results are summarized in Table 2. The relative inexperience of the Hispanic teenagers in dealing with the Corps of Engineers reservation system and fees produced a lot of uncertain responses and more mixed results than one might expect to find in a group of adults.

Table 2 Results of Questionnaire (St. Francis Church Focus Group)				
Statement	Strongly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
Hispanics would have difficulty paying a fee of \$3-5 per vehicle every time they came to a Corps park	4	1	3	1
Hispanic visitors who do not understand English encounter more problems during their park visits than do those who understand English		1	5	3
Park signs using international symbols would be an effective substitute for Spanish language signs	3	2	4	
The ability to make telephone or Internet reservations only in English prevents some Hispanic groups from reserving campsites or group shelters through the National Recreation Reservation System		1	5	3
Hispanic visitors are sometimes made to feel unwelcome by other visitors	3	4	1	1
Park staff sometimes make Hispanic visitors to Corps lakes feel unwelcome	2	4		3

DISCUSSION

Acculturation is a key concept in understanding the diverse recreational behavior of Hispanic visitors. A good index of acculturation is the visitor’s ability to communicate in English. A highly acculturated visitor would have the ability to read and speak English fluently. A moderately acculturated person might be able to speak some English but could not read or speak it fluently. The non-acculturated visitor could not read or speak English. In the discussion below we will use this same scheme, one in which the nonacculturated visitor is one who is non-English speaking. In addition, it should be noted that some Hispanic immigrants might speak fluent Spanish but still be illiterate and unable to read or write in Spanish or English. Researchers have found that varying degrees of acculturation can change the way Hispanic visitors perceive the benefits of water-based versus land-based recreation, modify their overall recreational style, change the size of their recreational groups, and the way these groups interact with Corps of Engineers personnel and other non-Hispanic visitors. The recreational style of

highly acculturated middle class Hispanic Americans, such as those in Texas and California, will differ significantly from unacculturated first generation Mexican immigrants. In Oklahoma at the present time, such a highly acculturated Hispanic middle class is quite small. Many middle class Hispanic professionals and their families are now being transplanted from other states like Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. They are a true minority among the Hispanics visiting Corps lakes in Oklahoma at this time. The majority of Hispanics visiting lakes in the Tulsa District appear to be low to moderately acculturated first-generation immigrants and their families.

Working class immigrant Hispanic families will recreate, or attempt to recreate, in traditional ways, much as they did in Mexico. They will attempt to reproduce in their new environment the culturally expressive recreational behaviors they grew up with. Unacculturated Hispanics will not usually imitate the recreational behavior of the established white (Anglo) society. What this means is that the management of Hispanic recreation at Corps projects is a *cultural* challenge as well as a linguistic one. Effective management of the growing Hispanic visitor population means that an effort must be made to understand the differences of Hispanic culture and how to manage the obvious linguistic barrier in the context of these real cultural differences. Does all this emphasis on the importance of acculturation mean that with the passage of time Hispanics will simply become more and more like white Americans and the Corps' management problem will gradually fade away? The short answer is probably not.

The classic American assimilation concept holds that immigrant groups (e.g., Irish, Italian, German, Polish, etc.) will all become more acculturated with time and all significant cultural differences will eventually disappear into an American melting pot. This concept has been abandoned by most researchers. While it is true that acculturation has occurred among Mexican American groups in Texas and California and other areas where they have lived for many generations, these Hispanic groups tend to retain a distinctive Hispanic culture and preserve recreational behaviors that express their basic cultural values. The traditional assimilation model is clearly deficient for understanding emerging Hispanic communities in parts of the United States that have not seen large Hispanic populations before. These emergent areas, and Oklahoma is one of them, are projected to receive successive waves of new Hispanic immigrants, both legal and illegal.

The continuing immigration of unacculturated Hispanics into an area tends to ensure their retention of both the Spanish language and the traditional emphasis on large extended families. Resistance to the dominant Anglo cultural pattern may be much stronger in these new communities than among older long-settled Hispanic communities. There is some indication in the anthropological literature that Anglo acculturation to Hispanic cultural patterns may even be more likely than Hispanic acculturation to Anglo patterns in such emergent areas (e.g., when working and middle class white males marry into Hispanic families). Because so many of the Hispanic visitors to Corps projects in Oklahoma are relatively unacculturated to American society, it is useful to point out the importance of two traditional Mexican cultural patterns that will impact Hispanic recreational behavior at Corps projects, the large extended family and the importance of the town square as the location for extended family recreation.

The traditional Mexican view of the social world can be thought of in terms of three concentric circles. First and foremost comes the family, at the center of which is the venerated matriarch of the family (e.g., grandmother or great grandmother). The typical Mexican family is a large extended family including not only parents and grandparents but also large numbers of aunts, uncles, and cousins. Loyalties outside this large family circle are traditionally confined to an immediate circle of friends, who may be *compadres* (godparents to one's children) or simply *cuates* ("pals"). The wider society outside of these two circles may be regarded with suspicion by many working class Mexicans. Such suspicion would be carried over into relations with government officials in the United States. In brief, the overall importance of family in Hispanic social life can hardly be overstated and may be difficult for many Anglos to fully comprehend.

While the majority of Mexican immigrants to the United States are mixed blood mestizos (white and Indian), it should be pointed out that Mexican society is far from racially or culturally homogeneous. Despite centuries of intermarriage between European settlers and native Mexican Indians, 20 percent of Mexicans still consider themselves to be purely indigenous (Indian). Some of these native Indian people are coming to the United States as well. They are bringing their own distinctive cultural patterns with them. The common culture of Mexico, as can be seen in their national cuisine, in fiestas, and in the arts and crafts of Mexico, blends cultural elements from all parts of the country. Even so, many pre-Columbian traditions, untouched by European influences, survive to this day. One of the traditional customs of Mexican life that has persisted for centuries is the tendency to seek family recreation in the town square or plaza. Pre-Columbian Mexicans sought out recreation in open central plazas in densely populated cities like Teotihuacan. The history of Mexican *mercados* (open-air markets) found in these town squares can be traced without interruption back to the Aztecs and even before.

Even in modern times working class Mexican families come to the town square to recreate. On Sundays, often the only day free from work, the town's families come out, many after attending a Catholic Mass, and spend hours shopping at the outdoor markets, buying clothes, food, and treats for their children, and visiting with each other. Young children indulge in uninhibited romping while under the not-so-watchful eyes of older siblings. The adults may participate in a variety of social and cultural activities, including favorite sports and traditional dancing. The town square may frequently serve as an amusement park with brightly painted rides for the children.

How are these traditional cultural behaviors being preserved among the new immigrants now coming to the United States? We believe that many Corps public-use areas are taking the place of the town square in traditional Mexican society. Mr. Kent Dunlap, lake manager at Keystone, agrees (personal communication at St. Francis debriefing). The Corps public-use areas provide a place for Hispanic family members to enjoy each other's company and to meet other families. They provide a place for families and *compadres* to recreate, play sports, and, most of all, a place to eat and drink together in a scenic outdoor setting. These are the same kinds of activities conducted in the Mexican town square.

The role of a water-based recreation pattern appears to be quite limited among unacculturated Hispanics. The Corps lake is used as a place to cool off and for children to wade in and splash about in the shallows. Among unacculturated Hispanic immigrants, there is little interest in

favorite Anglo forms of recreation such as fishing, boating, sailing, personal watercraft, and camping. The use of large recreational vehicles (RVs) for extended camping is unknown among the mostly Mexican people now coming into Oklahoma. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that during visits to California, Dunn (1999) saw first-hand tent and RV camping by highly acculturated Hispanic visitors at Corps projects in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Interest in camping by Oklahoma's Hispanics will probably increase with their gradual acculturation and the rise of some Hispanic families into the middle class, just as it has historically occurred in Texas and California.

The insight that acculturation is a significant driving force for recreation participation has several important ramifications for recreation management, both within and outside the Corps of Engineers. Gomez (1999) argued that the sense of belonging a minority visitor has to American society significantly impacts his participation in public recreation. If a Hispanic visitor does not feel accepted, he or she is not likely to participate in public recreation regardless of the strength of his or her subcultural (ethnic) identity. The best course of action to enhance both the quality of the Hispanic recreational experience and the quantity of Hispanic recreation participation is to increase this sense of belonging, the sense that the park managers "really care about you and your family."

The larger implication of Gomez' research is that to increase minority recreation participation, parks should be promoted as cultural centers, and recreation programs should be designed to be more inclusive of minority cultures. So, how can the Corps create this sense of belonging at its projects? What should the Tulsa District do to address the concerns of the Oklahoma Hispanic community at this time? The two Hispanic focus groups conducted by ERDC on August 24th and 25th identified a number of areas where there are opportunities for the Tulsa District to create or enhance a sense of belonging for its Hispanic visitors. We have organized them below into a series of goals and some of the alternative methods to achieve these goals.

Better Communication with Hispanic Visitors/Community

Goals:

- Effectively communicate with Hispanic visitors to Tulsa District projects on a wide range of important issues.
- Make the entire Hispanic community aware of the recreational and employment opportunities at Corps lakes.
- Promote the Corps' image as a Federal agency that truly cares about Hispanics and other minority groups.

Alternatives:

- Broadcast public service announcements about water safety in Spanish on Spanish radio stations.
- Provide brochures, maps, and Corps rules in Spanish.
- Provide bilingual (Spanish and English) signing and/or appropriate international symbols.
- Encourage Corps rangers to acquire Spanish language skills.
- Encourage cultural diversity awareness training for Corps rangers.

Improved Facilities

Goals:

- Allow large Hispanic families to eat and recreate together comfortably when they come on picnics and large extended family outings.
- Provide a clean, safe, and comfortable environment for Hispanic families.
- Provide facilities that fit Hispanic family group sizes and their recreation styles.

Alternatives:

- Provide group shelters, particularly near swim beaches.
- Provide moveable tables that can be arranged to meet needs of large groups.
- Maintain clean facilities.
- Provide large open grassy areas for group sports and family recreation.
- Install shower heads and improved bathroom facilities near swim beaches.

Improved Services

Goals:

- Reduce or eliminate the number of drownings by Hispanic visitors.
- Give Hispanic visitors a quality recreational experience and a greater sense of belonging.
- Change Hispanics' current perception that the Corps doesn't understand Hispanic culture.

Alternatives:

- Provide public service announcements on water safety in Spanish.
- Advertise on Spanish-speaking radio and in Spanish language newspapers.
- Encourage and co-sponsor Hispanic cultural events.
- Encourage rangers to acquire Spanish language skills and take cultural awareness training.

Recruitment Goals and Alternatives

Goals:

- Hire more Hispanic rangers (e.g., one or more rangers per lake in the Tulsa District over the next two years).

Alternatives:

- Increase number and intensity of recruiting trips to colleges.
- Visit high schools and plant seeds of interest among Hispanic youth in a career with the Corps.
- Advertise in states with large Hispanic populations like Texas and California.
- Create a part- or full-time position devoted to increasing workshop diversity such as those in the National Park Service's regional offices.

CONCLUSIONS

Tulsa District's recreation program is on the brink of a new era. As the regional Hispanic population triples over the next 25 years, Hispanic visitation to the District's many lakes and public-use areas is expected to increase. While a small highly acculturated Hispanic middle class, such as the stakeholder focus group participants, will contribute to this visitation, the majority of the District's Hispanic visitors will be low to moderately acculturated working-class men and women who are seeking recreational opportunities for their large families. The recreational style of these people will closely adhere to cultural patterns developed in Mexico and other Latin American countries, not to the water-based recreation so typical of the Corps' traditional white (Anglo) customer base.

Recreation is an expressive behavior that preserves and transmits basic cultural values. As long as successive waves of Hispanic immigration (both legal and illegal) continue, this Mexican/Latino recreational pattern will largely persist. The assimilation of Hispanic recreational patterns into a mythical "American melting pot" will not occur in the foreseeable future. Four characteristics of the unacculturated Hispanic visitors impressed themselves on the ERDC research team:

- Large family groups that do not match existing facilities, e.g., not enough tables, group shelters that are too small and/or too few, too few trash receptacles, etc.
- A strong cultural orientation to land-based or shoreline-based recreation; **not** to water-based recreation involving boats, skiing, use of personal water craft, etc.
- A strong attachment to Spanish and to their Mexican/Latino cultural heritage; the relatively slow acquisition of English when compared to other ethnic minority groups (e.g., Asian groups).
- Relative low socioeconomic status of first- and even second-generation immigrants; the relative lack of disposable income precludes the purchase of expensive recreational vehicles, boats, and personal water craft, even if these items were seen as desirable by second-generation immigrant families.

These group characteristics present the District with an interesting, if not formidable, management challenge. Facility modification is relatively straightforward and future modifications will probably depend upon the actual or projected Hispanic usage of specific District projects. Facility modifications such as those discussed in the focus group sessions would be entirely appropriate at projects with heavy Hispanic visitation. The use of surveys and focus groups by Corps project managers to determine the specific needs and desires of their minority customers is the major focus of ERDC Technical Report (R-99-1) *Methodology for Recreation Data Acquisition and Evaluation for Ethnic Minority Visitors to CE Projects* (Dunn and Quebedeaux 1999).

Regarding the numerous service improvements discussed in the focus groups, improved communication on two levels appears essential. First, communication in the form of community outreach to the Hispanic community as a whole must be improved. The role of highly acculturated middle-class Hispanic professionals is very important at this high level. The focus groups conducted in Tulsa in August 2001 should be regarded as a first step to a much expanded

community outreach effort. Groups such as the Greater Tulsa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce should be used as a resource and sounding board by the District on a routine basis in the future.

Second, communication with the nonacculturated Hispanic end user must also be improved. We have identified ethnic diversity awareness training for rangers, the acquisition of basic Spanish language skills by non-Hispanic rangers, the use of international symbols, bilingual signing and publications, and the pro-active recruitment of Hispanics as viable alternatives to meet this particular communication challenge.

The future of the Corps recreation program, while uncertain in the face of rapidly changing demographics, should be a bright one if the Corps approaches the ethnic diversity management challenge with confidence and the strong desire to give all its visitors a sense of belonging. It is clear from the feedback we have received following the Tulsa focus groups that they were a valuable first step.

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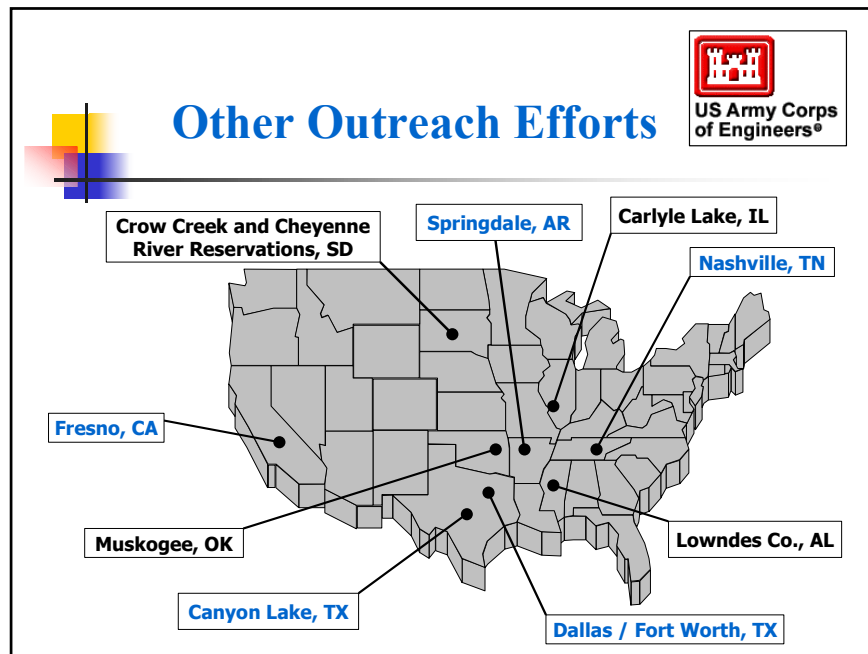
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***NOTE:** The contents of this technical note are not to be used for advertising, publication, or promotional purposes. Citation of trade names does not constitute an official endorsement or approval of the use of such products.*

Appendix A

PowerPoint Presentation to Greater Hispanic Chamber of Commerce



Slide 1

Tulsa Community Outreach Effort

- **Purpose**
 - Identify how Corps of Engineers can improve outdoor recreation opportunity on Corps-managed recreation areas for Tulsa's growing Hispanic population
- **Partners**
 - Tulsa District Corps of Engineers
 - Engineer Research and Development Center and Dale Brown & Associates
 - Community leaders and visitors

Slide 2

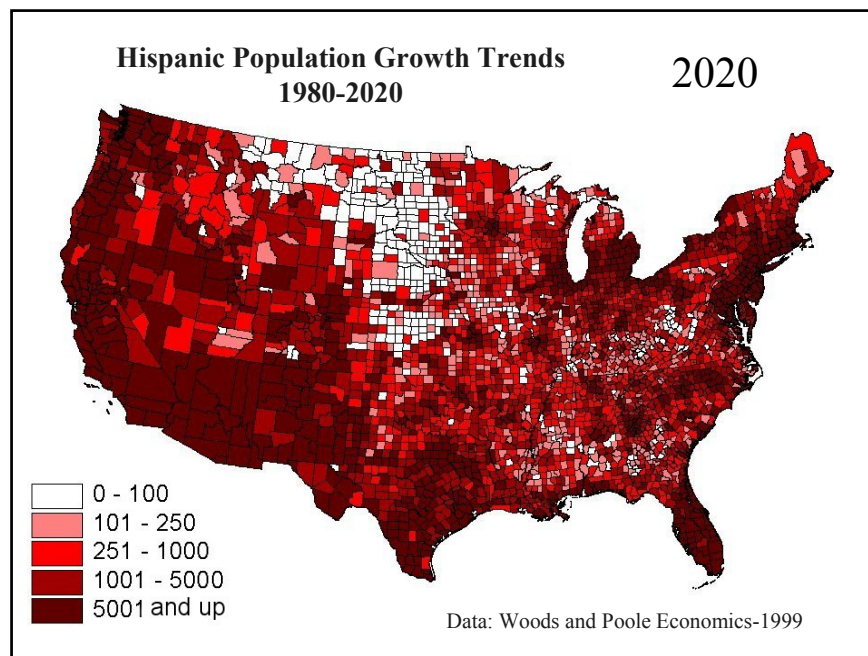


Why Community Outreach?




- **The US population is changing**
 - More racially and ethnically diverse
- **Visitors to CE lakes are changing**
 - Increase in “nontraditional” user groups (Latino, Asian American, etc.)
 - New styles of use
- **Improve recreation opportunity for emerging user groups**
 - To do that, we need your help!

Slide 3




Slide 4



Corps of Engineers


Tulsa District



Fort Gibson Dam

- Builds and operates federal water resource development projects for navigation, water supply, flood control and hydropower
- Manages 28 lakes in Oklahoma for recreation
- Receives 25 million recreation visits a year
- Largest provider of outdoor recreation opportunity in Oklahoma

Slide 5



What Will We Do Today?

- Facilitated discussion of issues (Dale Brown)
- Your reaction to selected issues (if we have time)
- Summary of findings and recommendations
 - Introduce agency representatives
 - Distribute box lunch
 - Did we get it right?
- Informal discussions following the meeting

Slide 6



After Today

- Report of findings and recommendations
 - Tulsa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
 - Tulsa District
 - Corps National leadership
- Assess and implement findings and recommendations
- Explore partnering opportunities to improve outdoor recreation
- Stay in touch so we can address emerging issues

Slide 7



Key Discussion Questions

- What are the unmet recreation needs of Hispanic visitors to Corps lakes in the Tulsa area?
- What are the major barriers to meeting those needs?
- How can the Corps overcome barriers and improve outdoor recreation opportunities for Hispanic visitors?

Slide 8

Appendix B

Stakeholder Focus Group Participants

Attendees of the 25 August 2001 focus group meeting held at the DoubleTree Hotel- Warren Place, Tulsa OK. Topic: Meeting the needs of Hispanic recreation visitors to Corps of Engineer lakes.

Name	Affiliation/Mailing Address	Contact Information
<i>Focus Group Organizers:</i>		
F. Dale Brown	Dale Brown and Associates 602 Future St., Marion, IL 62959	dalebrown01@earthlink.net 618-997-2400
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Focus Group Participants:

Lorenzo Alvarez	DoubleTree Hotel- Warren Place 6110 S. Yale Ave., Tulsa OK 74136	lalvarcz@dtwarrenplace.com
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Robert Tobias	Tulsa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce 10802 East 31st St., Suite A, Tulsa OK 74147	HispanicChamber@aol.com

Name	Affiliation/Mailing Address	Contact Information
<i>Debriefing Attendees:</i>		
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Michael Schrick	Chief Ranger, Keystone Lake Keystone Area Office U.S. Army Engineer District, Tulsa 23115 West Wekiwa, Sand Springs, OK 74063	Michael.Schrick@swt03.usace.army.mil 918-865-2621
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Appendix C
Focus Group Questionnaire

Instructions: Rate your degree of agreement with each of the following statements as they apply to Hispanic/Latino visitors to Corps of Engineer lakes in the Tulsa area.

Statement	Circle Number Corresponding to Your Level of Agreement with Each Statement:							Comments or Clarifications (use back if necessary)		
	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree	Not Sure
Hispanic visitors would have difficulty paying a fee of \$3-5 per vehicle every time they came to a Corps park.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		NS
Hispanic visitors who do not understand English encounter more problems during their park visits than do those who understand English.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		NS
Park signs using international symbols would be an effective substitute for Spanish language signs.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		NS
The ability to make telephone or Internet reservations only in English prevents some Hispanic groups from reserving campsites or group shelters through the National Recreation Reservation Service.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		NS
Hispanic visitors are sometimes made to feel unwelcome by other visitors.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		NS
Park staff sometimes make Hispanic visitors to Corps lakes feel unwelcome.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		NS